

**September 22, 2011**

## **Wetland Conditions Favor Duck Hunters**

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's annual fall wetland survey indicates good to excellent wetland conditions statewide for duck hunting.

Mike Szymanski, migratory game bird biologist, said hunters will need to scout because birds may be spread out with all the water and potential places to hunt.

"Most areas of the state have similar conditions to last year, with the exceptions of the northwest and southeast areas," Szymanski said. "The number of wetlands in the northwest part of the state holding water during the survey nearly tripled from last year. However, on the flip side, the southeast part of the state has about half as many wetlands with water in them. Nonetheless, there are still abundant opportunities for duck hunters in southeast North Dakota."

Unfortunately, hunters wishing to venture to northwest North Dakota may have some difficulty. For various reasons, lodging in that part of the state is scarce, Szymanski said, and hunters should definitely call ahead to check the status of availability. In addition, hunters should use caution on roadways as fall can be an especially busy time of year.

Three consecutive winters with significant snowfall refilled wetlands, and considerable rainfall this past summer has maintained water levels in more temporary-type wetlands, Szymanski said. "There was some drying during a nearly three-week period without rain prior to the survey," he added. "Immediately following the survey, much of the northern tier of the state experienced 1-4 inches of rain, refilling wetlands that were beginning to dry up."

Soft ground conditions will greet hunters in many areas of the state, so Szymanski urges caution when driving in or across fields this fall. Moreover, there are many closed roads, and hunters may need to spend some time figuring out how to get to some of their favorite areas.

"As always, the quality of the waterfowl hunting season in North Dakota is predicated on weather conditions," Szymanski said. "But strong reproduction for both ducks and geese, and excellent wetland conditions point toward a good fall."

The wetland survey is conducted in mid-September just prior to the waterfowl hunting season, to provide an assessment of conditions duck hunters can expect.

Opening day for North Dakota residents is Sept. 24 for ducks, coots, mergansers and geese. Nonresidents may begin hunting waterfowl in North Dakota Oct. 1.